

MASONRY IN MANITOBA

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CAN FREEMASONRY HELP?

(Second installment)

THE CLASS WAR OF THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL JUSTICE. Forms of social organization and methods of earning our living influence our outlook upon life, and so have a reflex action on society. Feudalism has been superseded by capitalism, and so the medieval virtues of chivalry and honour have given way to an aggressive individualism, and the acceptance of money standards as signs of success in life. The growth of cities, the owning of capital, and the control of finance have given great power to a few people in each nation. The acquisitive instinct has made a sick society. The rise and development of trades unionism and other workers' movements indicate that the workers feel that they must come closer together in order to make their collective bargaining power more effective. There is no need for me to remind you that, under the doctrine of laissez faire, it was thought that social harmony would be achieved if every man sought what was good in his own eyes. After experimenting with this ideal for a few centuries, we find that society is riddled with divisions, and so we have class war between those who own or direct business enterprises and those who are employed by them.

Social justice is only possible when we place personal relationships and spiritual values before property and the values of the market place. I have read many books on economics and sociology, but I do not know of any piece of literature containing more concentrated wisdom on the question of social justice and security than the section of the V.S.L., which reads: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all of these things will be added unto you." That means that social justice and all-round security are the outcome of right living, and it is only when we learn to meet one another on the level and part on the square that there is any hope of having real social harmony. Real living is meeting and sharing our experiences, but what is happening in the workaday world? We find, with the advent of the joint stock company and other organizations of a similar kind, that industry tends to become less and less personal. The personal contact is lost, and we feel that we are working for, instead of with, men for a common end. In Freemasonry we are taught that men are not esteemed on account of their worldly substance, the implication being that they are valued for the quality of their lives. Are we prepared to put first things first in the workaday world? That is our Masonic teaching, and it is the only way to achieve social justice.

MORAL INDIFFERENCE—THE PROBLEM OF ETHICAL STANDARDS. The teaching of the non-moral and secular state, and the dominance of the profit motive in industry, together with the decline in responsible family life and directed domestic influence, have produced an air of moral indifference in the modern world. Hence an idea that is canvassed today is that morality is just a social convention. As such, it has no absolute quality about it; it is relative to the society of which we are members. It can be expressed in this way: "When in Rome, do as the Romans do," or "Melbourne manners are different from Sydney standards," so "suit yourself, do as you like!" We find that people are not so badly immoral, but they are what is technically termed "amoral." They do not raise the question of right or wrong in their common relationships. They do not ask, "What ought I to do, and why?" They just follow convention or inclination.

Freemasonry is very emphatic that ethical standards are not arbitrary rules, like certain municipal regulations. Ethical standards are part of a religion and a form of the life of God. Freemasonry is a system of morality, not a religion, but its source and sanctions are in religion. There is no need for me to debate that aspect. We all begin Freemasonry on our knees, and the sacred symbol appears in all our temples. We seek to create an atmosphere of religion, because that permits the tree of morality to bear its best fruit. We are told that a Mason must not be a stupid atheist, and that he must believe in the moral order, which plays a vital part in the constitution of the universe, just the same as the laws of nature, although they operate upon a lower plane. I do not think any one of us would contend that the laws of nature are purely arbitrary! It would, indeed, be a sad world if they were. If water boiled at one temperature today and at a different temperature tomorrow, the result would be chaos. It is because we have law and order in the world that we can not only review the past, but also forecast the future. The fact that nature is dependable is the basis of science and reason. When we come to the moral plane of our experience, we find that the moral principles are not arbitrary. Truth, justice, honour, fair play, and so on, are moral principles that are part of the constitution of human life. The laws of nature have been described as "the personal habits of God." Adopting that analogy, we find that the moral laws are the principles of the character of God. We are told that Freemasonry is founded on the purest principles of piety and virtue, and we are exhorted to practice every moral and social virtue. One of the main functions of Freemasonry in England and other parts of the world in the eighteenth century was to counteract the moral indifference of that period. Freemasons, by the application of the rule of rectitude, can make a real contribution towards the present problem of moral indifference.

(To be continued)

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

One of our younger members asked this question not long ago, "What has Masonry done for me?" There is a challenge in this question because it was evident he had either expected something which had not been received or the ceremonies had been imperfectly communicated. We have a solemn responsibility to the young fellows who are knocking at our door. Of course the answer will never be found on a purely materialistic level.

In all directions we see men who seem like a ship without a rudder. One wonders whether the frantic effort to find an escape from the realities of life does not rest quite so much on a desire from the sacrificial demands of Masonry as upon the ideal of an easy life.

We want a government which will safeguard our profits and guarantee our indulgences, but we are unwilling to pay the price of public service. We shrink the obligations of public life; we neglect our duties of citizenship; we cry that democracy is a failure. We have forgotten that the construction of a stable social order still demands, as it ever did, the highest self devotion and the most resolute self sacrifice.

Our perspectives and our horizons have been limited by our own personal interests, by selfish enterprises. We assume no responsibility for the good of our Province, for the advancement of Canada, for the welfare of mankind. Being guilty of these charges we sit back and criticize, everybody is out of step except the critic.

Let me illustrate what is in mind. Here is a familiar object lying before me on the table—a contraption—a dead and soundless thing of wood and catgut. Human genius fashioned it after a pattern in the mind. It is an embodied idea, yet in itself a lifeless piece of matter.

Here again is a living soul into which God has breathed the Spirit of Music. So far that spirit has been dumb and impotent. It has lacked an organ of self-expression and the restless spirit wears itself out in futile yearning to release the energies within it.

Place now that dead thing in that living hand and observe the effect. In the hand of the musician the piece of matter comes to life. It integrates itself with his inmost being; it becomes, organically, one with him and he with it. The strings begin to vibrate. It has become a violin, a thing of beauty to the eye and ecstasy to the ear and through that instrument the soul of the master passes into deed.

So it is with our Freemasonry. You are the master in whose hands has been placed the working tools of the Craft. In our campaign for a better Manitoba, a greater Canada, a peaceful world, we can, through the eyes of faith, see our ranks move forward, fair as the moon, clear as the sun and terrible as an army with banners.

Let us then be better Masons.

AN INTERESTING CELEBRATION

One of our Brandon brothers who arrived in Canada about a year ago sends an interesting item regarding the romantic origin of Ayr St. Paul's Lodge No. 204, Scotland, on the tented field one hundred and fifty years ago.

Under the threat of invasion by Napoleon the militia had been mobilized and Freemasons in the Ayr and Renfrew militia finding themselves stationed at Linlithgow and out of touch with their mother lodge petitioned Grand Lodge for a travelling charter that they might meet in lodge wherever they were stationed.

John Laughlin, son of the putative original of Burns' Souter Johnny, went to Edinburgh, and obtained a letter of constitution dated 4th February 1799, under which the lodge operated for a year when its status was confirmed by charter, its designation being "Ayr and Renfrew Militia St. Paul's No. 271." The lodge still preserves this original document as one of its most cherished possessions.

The introduction and development of Freemasonry in Canada can be traced to the travelling Military Lodges attached to the troops. This can be learned by a reference to the history of the Craft in the Maritimes and Quebec. Here in Manitoba we got our first start by and through the Masonic brethren attached to Hatch's Battalion, who were quartered at Pembina in 1863. Then later, when our original Lodge dissolved, Prince Rupert's Lodge No. 1 obtained its charter from the Grand Lodge of Canada (in Ontario) by reason of an application made by the soldier-Masons attached to the Wolseley Expedition.

One can find an interesting field of research if he would follow the subject of Masonry in military circles.

A MASONIC REVERIE

In the course of our reading which is a very necessary pastime when one has the responsibility to prepare these pages for the brethren, we came across this gem.

"Masonry, as we see it in our dreams and enjoy it in our fellowship, is like a grand cathedral: Faith is its foundation; Righteousness, its corner stone; Strength and Wisdom, its walls; Beauty, its form and fashion; Brotherly Love, its clasped arches; Reverence, its roof; The Bible, its altar light; Mysticism, its music; Charity, its incense; Fellowship, its sacrament; and Relief its ritual. Its symbols are windows nobly wrought, half revealing, half concealing a truth too elusive for words, too vast for dogma, and too bright for eyes unveiled."

MEN LOVE FREEMASONRY—WHY?

Is it the love of the mysterious which is common to all men? We search for that which was lost. But searching has been a passion of man since the dawn of time. The man hunt; the beast hunt; the food hunt; the hunt for gold; for power, for truth, for discovery; the urge to seek and find is in our blood.

Freemasonry is but one of many agencies which have sought the elusive and I sometimes wonder how diligently some of our brethren prosecute their avowed search.

What is the urge? Is it our sense of age and antiquity? Is it our knowledge that Freemasonry makes us brother to all mankind. Or do we glorify the fact that our origin is lost in the mists of yesterday.

I am satisfied there is a deep reason which prompts such a multitude of good men to enroll themselves under the banner of the Craft.

Many a Mason loves his Mother Lodge for personal reasons known only to himself.

The lodge room is more than a gathering place for congenial souls. We admit that some of our fellows find the lodge helpful in a social way and we have even known some members who have, in a business way, condescended to join a lodge. Then again we occasionally meet those who like our dinners, banquets and social gatherings. Others like to be dressed up—wearing a sword and showing a bit of outward authority.

These are not the reasons that brought His Majesty King George to the door of a Masonic Lodge and they do not activate the great body of Freemasons.

Men do love their lodge. That which binds in a common love the man in Calcutta to the man in London; the man in Hong Kong to the man in Montreal; the man in Vancouver to the man in Melbourne, is the spirit of true and genuine brotherhood.

To the end that we of this generation will work toward the universal ideal let us rededicate ourselves, individually, to the work we have undertaken as Craftsmen.

SEEKING INFORMATION

We intimated to our readers a few months ago that seekers after Masonic knowledge could be helpfully assisted in their quest by purchasing a whole library of their own for ten dollars.

Our purpose is not to act as a sales agency for a publisher but to be of real service to the brethren and it is gratifying to learn

that several members have availed of the offer. Might we add that you can still avail yourself of a set of these books if you are really interested.

From the top of the highest skyscraper in Winnipeg a man can take in with one sweep of his eye the vast panorama of prairie stretching away to the far horizon. There is no book in existence from which a Mason can take in the far vaster panorama of Freemasonry. He can however, equip himself with an education on things Masonic from the books we are recommending and he will obtain an outline which will be of precious value to him throughout his days.

We cannot begin to tell you the titles of the different subjects dealt with. This is a veritable treasure house and once again we draw the matter to the attention of the men who truly seek to read the literature of the Craft.

FROM THE MAIL BAG

One of our members, sojourning in the sunshine of Florida, noticed the following on an exhibit at a flower show. "If you would grow orchids like this you must guard against this (he neglected to note the disease).

From the words of the expert gardener our correspondent applied the advice to the Craft thus:

Masonic Morbus is a disease peculiar to Masonry. Attacks usually come at "the full of the moon" and continue until the lodge meeting is over. Then the patient feels easy and can go around a little, walk down for the mail; make a social call. On the next morning he returns to normal, goes to work as usual. There are no more symptoms of the disease until he receives a Lodge notice and learns that the full of the moon has come.

Some of the features of the disease are:

- (1) It attacks Masons only.
- (2) While symptoms vary, it never interferes with sleep or appetites.
- (3) Attacks are always around "the full of the moon," never lasting more than a few hours.
- (4) It always proves fatal in the end—to the soul.

To build up resistance against the disease it is advisable to attend Lodge at least once a month.